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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/E AND DRL/IRF
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/05/2019
TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [ER](#)
SUBJECT: GSE FURTHER ISOLATES RELIGIOUS DETAINEES

REF: 08 ASMARA 605

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d).

11. (C) The Eritrean government (GSE) has recently been relocating prisoners from Asmara to an isolated prison in the small town of Meiter, located 113 miles northeast of Asmara, near the coastal city of Massawa. The newly constructed prison is already filled with between 150 and 200 detainees held for religious beliefs. Embassy sources state that Meiter is known for its extreme isolation. Prisoners attempting to escape at night are supposedly not chased. Instead, guards head out the next morning to retrieve the body from the desert. Prisoners in Meiter are not afforded family visits, as is sometimes the case for those held in police stations and other prisons in Asmara. There is reportedly one bus that travels from Asmara to the area near Meiter once a week.

12. (C) As of Thursday, April 30, the GSE relocated all imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses (reftel) from Asmara to Meiter. The GSE has also transferred over 60 prisoners of other non-approved religious groups to Meiter in recent months. Some of these prisoners have been released after signing a form recanting their faith. Prisoners also include those who broadly label themselves as "Christian" rather than specifically Orthodox, Catholic, or Lutheran; they are held until they agree to join one of the approved religious groups.
MCMULLEN